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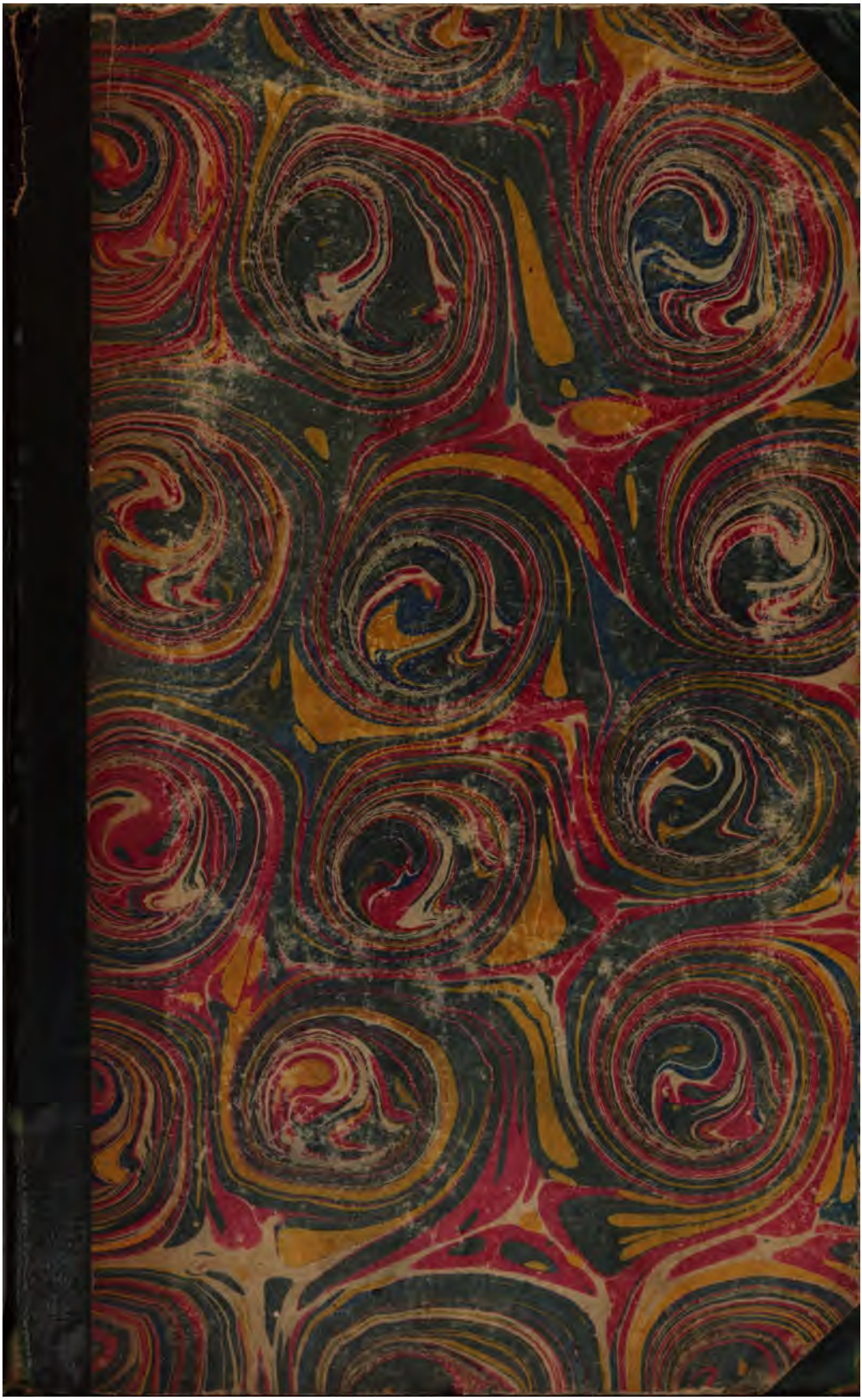

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TO

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ANSWER

TO

Dr. PRIESTLEY'S

LETTERS

TO A Wm Hammon

PHILOSOPHICAL UNBELIEVER.

PART I.

LONDON.

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THE Editor of this publication has more in object to anſwer Dr. Prieſtley than to deliver his own ſentiments upon Natural Religion, which however he has no inclination to diſguiſe: but he does not mean to be anſwerable for them farther, than as by reaſon and nature he is at preſent inſtructed. The queſtion here handled is not ſo much, whether a Deity and his attributed excellences exiſt, as whether there is any Natural or Moral proof of his exiſtence and of thoſe attributes. Revealed knowledge is not deſcanted upon; therefore Chriſtians at leaſt need take no offence. Doubts upon

upon Natural Religion have not hitherto been looked upon as attacks upon Revelation, but rather as corroborations of it. What the Editor believes as a Chriſtian (if he is one) is therefore another affair, nor does he reckon himſelf ſo infallible or incapable of alteration in his ſentiments, as not at another time to adopt different ones upon more reflexion and better information; therefore, though he has at preſent little or no doubt of what he aſſerts (taken upon the principles laid down) he ſhall hold himſelf totally freed from any neceſſity of defending the contents of this publication, if brought into controverſy; and as he has no deſire of making converts, hopes he ſhall not himſelf be marked out as an object of perſecution.

Specu-

Speculative points have always been eſteemed fair matters for a free diſcuſſion. The religion eſtabliſhed in this country is not the religion of Nature, but the religion of Moſes and Jeſus, with whom the writer has nothing to do. He truſts therefore he ſhall not be received as a malevolent diſturber of ſuch common opinions as are eſteemed to keep in order a ſet of low wretches ſo inclinable to be lawleſs. At leaſt, if he attempts to ſubſtitute better foundations for morality, malevolence can be no juſt charge. Truth is his aim; and no profeſſors of religion will allow their ſyſtem to be falſe. Or if he ſhould be thought too bold a ſpeculator, ſuch of the eccleſiaſtics as will be his opponents may rather

rather laugh at him than fear him. They have a thouſand ways of making their ſentiments go down with the bulk of mankind, to one this poor writer has. They are an army ready marſhalled for the ſupport of their own theſis; they are in the habit of controverſy; pulpits are open to them as well as the preſs; and while the preſent author will be looked upon as a miracle of hardineſs for daring to put his name to what he publiſhes, they can without fear or imputation lift up their heads; and ſhould they even be known to tranſgreſs the bounds of good ſenſe or politeneſs, they will only be eſteemed as more zealous labourers in their own vocation.

PREFATORY ADDRESS.

DR. PRIESTLEY,

YOUR Letters addreſſed to a Philoſophical Unbeliever I peruſed, not becauſe I was a Philoſopher or an Unbeliever; it were preſumption to give myſelf the former title, and at that time I certainly did not deſerve the latter; but as I was acquainted with another, who in reality, as far as I and others who know him can judge, deſerves the title of a Philoſopher and is neither aſhamed nor afraid of that of an Unbeliever, I conceived them apt to be ſent to my friend, and when I preſented them to him, he ſaid, he was the perſon whom he ſhould ſuppoſe you meant to addreſs, if you had a particular perſon in view; but he had too much underſtanding of the world, though much abſtracted from the dregs of it, not to conceive it more probable that you meant your Letters to be peruſed by thinking men in general, Believers and Unbelievers, to confirm the former in their creed, and to convert the latter from their error. You ſhall ſpeedily know the effect they

have had in both ways. For myſelf I muſt inform you that I was brought up a Believer from my infancy; a Theiſt, if a Chriſtian is ſuch; for I ſuppoſe the word will be allowed, though the equivalent term of Deiſt is ſo generally reprobated by Chriſtians; I had before my eyes the example of a moſt amiable parent; a moral man, a Chriſtian undoubtedly; who, when I have been attending upon him, as much from affection as from duty, upon a ſick and nearly dying bed, has prayed I might be ſtedfaſt in the faith he held, in accents ſtill ſounding in my intellectual ear; a parent, whom for his virtues and love of his offspring, like a Chineſe, I am tempted to worſhip, and I could exclaim with the firſt of poets,

"*Erit ille mihi ſemper Deus.*"

With ſuch habits of education then, ſuch fervent advice and ſuch reverence for my inſtructor, what can have turned me from my belief; for I confeſs I am turned? Immorallity it is not; that I aſſert has not preceded my unbelief, and I truſt never will follow it; there has not indeed yet been time for it to follow; whether it is a probable conſequence will preſently be diſcuſſed; but it is *thought*, free thought upon the ſubject; when I began freely

ly to think I proceeded boldly to doubt; your Letters gave me the cauſe for thinking, and my ſcepticiſm was exchanged for conviction; not entirely by the peruſal of your Letters; for I do not think they would quite have made me an Atheiſt! but by attention to that anſwer from my friend, which I have his permiſſion to ſubjoin.

In mentioning that doubts aroſe by reading your very Letters, which were written to eradicate all doubts, let me not accuſe you of being unequal to the taſk aſſumed. I mean no ſuch charge. You have in my opinion been fully equal to the diſcuſſion, and have handled the argument ably, pleaſingly and politely. I am certain from the extracts you have made from Dr. Clarke, the firſt of other Divines, I ſhould have been converted from my ſuperſtition by his reaſoning, even without peruſal of an anſwer: I pay you however the compliment of having only brought me to doubt, and I find I am not the only perſon who have been led to diſbelieve by reading books expreſsly written to confirm the Believer. Stackhouſe's Comment upon the Bible, and Leland's View of Deiſtical Writers have perhaps made as many renegado's in this country as all the allurements of

Mahometaniſm has in others. What can be ſaid to this? They were both undoubtedly men of abilities, and meant well to the cauſe they had to ſupport. All that I ſhall obſerve upon the matter is, that what cannot bear diſcuſſion cannot be true. Reaſoning in other ſciences is the way to arrive at truth: the learned for a while may differ, but argument at laſt finds its force, and the controverſy uſually ends in general conviction. Reaſoning upon the ſcience of divinity will equally have its weight, and all men of letters would long ago have got rid of all ſuperſtitious notions of a Deity, but that men of letters are frequently men of weak nerves; ſuch as Dr. Johnſon is well known to be, that great triumph to religioniſts; it requires courage as well as ſenſe to break the ſhackles of a pious education; but if merely a reſolve to reaſon upon their force can break them, what can we obſerve in concluſion but

"*Magnus eſt veritas et prevalebit.*"

That Religion or belief of a Deity cannot bear the force of argument is well known by Divines in general, is manifeſt by their annexing an idea of reproach to the very term of arguing upon the ſubject. Theſe arguers they call Free-thinkers, and

and this appellation has obtained, in the underſtanding of pious believers, the moſt odious diſgrace. Yet we cannot argue without thinking; nor can we either think or argue to any purpoſe without freedom. Therefore free-thinking, ſo far from being a diſgrace, is a virtue, a moſt commendable quality. How abſurd, and how cruel it is in the profeſſors of divinity, to addreſs the underſtanding of men on the ſubject of their belief, and to upbraid thoſe very men who ſhall exerciſe their underſtanding in attending to their arguments! No tyranny is greater than that of eccleſiaſtics. Theſe chain down our very ideas, other tyrants only confine our limbs. They invite us to the argument, yet damn us to eternal puniſhment for the uſe of reaſon on the ſubject. They give to man an eſſence diſtinct from his corporeal appearance, and this they call his ſoul, a very ray and particle of the Divine Being; the principal faculty of this ſoul they allow to be that of reaſoning, and yet they call reaſon a dark lanthorn, an erroneous vapour, a falſe medium, and at laſt the very inſtrument of another fancied Being of their own to lead men into their own deſtruction. "*In the image of himſelf made he man.*" A favourite text with theologians; but ſurely they do not

mean

mean that this God Almighty of theirs has got a face and perſon like a man. No; that they exclaim againſt, and, when we puſh them for the reſemblance, they confeſs it is in the uſe of reaſon; it is in the ſoul.

I am aware that I am not here to mix queſtions of Chriſtianity with the general queſtion of a Divinity; ſubjects of a very diſtinct enquiry, and which in the Letters to a Philoſophical Unbeliever are very carefully ſeparated. The ſubject of revelation is indeed promiſed afterwards to be taken up, provided the argument in favour of Natural Religion meets with a good reception. How, Dr. Prieſtley, you can judge of that reception I am at a loſs to know, otherwiſe than by the number of editions you publiſh. It is then in the ſum total juſt as much as if you had ſaid, "provided this book ſells well I will write another." Yet it may be ſold to many ſuch readers as I have been, though you will hardly call ſuch reception good. You that have wrote ſo much, to whom it is ſo eaſy to write more, who profeſs a belief of revelation, ſuch a laborious enquirer, and ſo great a maſter of the art of reaſoning, ſhould rather have engaged at once to prove in a ſubſequent publication the truth

truth of revealed religion in arguments, as candid and as fairly drawn as thoſe you have uſed in proof of a Deity independent of revelation. Different as I am in qualifications from you, not very learned, far from induſtrious, unuſed to publiſh, I do now promiſe that when you ſhall have brought into light your intended letters in behalf of revelation I will anſwer them. I hope you will take it as an encouragement to write that you are ſure you ſhall have an anſwer. I mean you ſhould, and I am ſure I ſhall think myſelf greatly honoured if you will deſcend ſo far as to reply to my preſent anſwer. I know you have been uſed in controverſies to have the laſt word, and in this I ſhall not baulk your ambition; for notwithſtanding any defect of my plea in favour of atheiſm I mean to join iſſue upon your replication, and by no means, according to the practice and language of the lawyers, to put in a rejoinder. Should your arguments be defectively anſwered by me, ſhould your learning and your reaſoning be more conſpicuous than mine, I ſhall bear your triumph without repining.

I declare I am rather pleaſed there are ſo few atheiſts than at all anxious to make more. I triumph

umph in my ſuperior light. I am like the Jew or the Bramin, who equally think themſelves privileged in their ſuperior knowledge of the ſuppoſed Deity. With me and with my friend the compariſon holds by way of contraſt, for we are ſo proud in our ſingularity of being atheiſts that we will hardly open our lips in company, when the queſtion is ſtarted for fear of making converts, and ſo leſſening our own enjoyment by a numerous diviſion of our privilege with others. It has indeed often been diſputed, whether there is or ever was ſuch a character in the world as an atheiſt. That it ſhould be diſputed is to me no wonder. Every thing may be, and almoſt every thing has been diſputed. There are few or none who will venture openly to acknowledge themſelves to be atheiſts. I know none among my acquaintance, except that one friend, to whom as a Philoſophical Unbeliever I preſented your Letters, and to whoſe anſwer I only mean this addreſs as an introduction. I ſhall therefore not enter here into the main argument of Deity or no Deity. My addreſs is only preliminary to the ſubject; but I do not therefore think myſelf precluded from entering into ſome conſiderations that may be thought incidental to it. I mean ſuch conſiderations as whether

ther immorality, unhappineſs or timidity neceſſarily do or naturally ought to enſue from a ſyſtem of atheiſm. But as to the queſtion whether there is ſuch an exiſtent Being as an atheiſt, to put that out of all manner of doubt, I do declare upon my honour that I am one. Be it therefore for the future remembered, that in London in the kingdom of England, in the year of our Lord one thouſand ſeven hundred and eighty-one, a man has publickly declared himſelf an atheiſt. When my friend returned me your Letters, addreſſing me with a grave face he ſaid, "I hope, if you have any doubts, theſe Letters will have as good effect upon you as they have had upon me." My countenance brightened up and I replied, "You are then, my friend, convinced?" "Yes, he ſaid, I am convinced; that is, I am moſt thoroughly convinced there is no ſuch thing as a God." Behold then, if we are to be believed, two atheiſts inſtead of one.

Another queſtion has been raiſed "whether a ſociety of atheiſts can exiſt?" In other words "whether honeſty ſufficient for the purpoſes of civil ſociety can be inſured by other motives than the belief of a Deity?" Bayle has handled that

queſtion well *. Few who know how to reaſon (and it is in vain to ſpeak or think of thoſe who lay reaſon out of the caſe) can fail to be convinced by the arguments of Bayle. I ſhall diſcuſs the queſtion no farther than as it is neceſſarily included in the diſcuſſion of ſome of thoſe ſuppoſed reſults of atheiſm, ſuch as I have before mentioned in the inſtances of immorality, unhappineſs and timidity. In my argument upon this ſubject I ſhall carefully avoid all abuſe and ridicule. Controverſies are apt to be accrimonious. You, Sir, have certainly ſhewn inſtances to the contrary. You have charity beyond your fellows in the eccleſiaſtical line, and your anſwerers ſeem not to me to have a right in fair argument to ſtep out of the limits you have preſcribed yourſelf. To diſpute with you is a pleaſure equal almoſt to that of agreeing with another perſon. You have candour enough to allow it poſſible that an atheiſt may be a moral man. Where is that other eccleſiaſtic who will allow the ſame? Your anſwerers ought alſo to hold themſelves precluded from uſing ridicule in handling this ſubject. I am no great ſupporter of Lord Shafteſbury's doctrine that ridicule is the teſt of truth. I own truth can never be

* *Penſées ſur la Comète.*

be ridiculous, that is, it can never be worthy of laughter, but ſtill it may be laughed at. To uſe the other term, I may ſay, truth can never be worthy of ridicule, but ſtill it may be ridiculed. Juſt ridicule is a ſufficient teſt of truth; but after all we ſhould be driven to an inquiry, upon the principles of reaſoning, whether the ridicule were juſt or not. Boldneſs, which is not incompatible with decency and candour, I do hold to be an abſolute requiſite in all ſpeech and argument, where truth is the object of inquiry. Therefore when I am aſked, whether there is a God or no God, I do not mince the matter, but I boldly anſwer there is none, and give my reaſons for my diſbelief; for I adopt my friend's anſwer by the publication of it.

That miſchief may enſue to ſociety by ſuch freedom of diſcuſſion is alſo another argument for me to conſider; I do not ſay to combat, for though I were convinced or could not reſiſt the argument that miſchief would enſue to ſociety by ſuch a diſcuſſion, yet I ſhould think myſelf intitled to enter into it. I have a right to truth, and to publiſh truth, let ſociety ſuffer or not ſuffer by it. That ſociety which ſuffers by truth ſhould be otherwiſe conſtituted; and as I cannot well think that truth

will hurt any ſociety rightly conſtituted, ſo I ſhould rather be inclined to doubt the force of the argument in caſe atheiſm being found to be truth ſhould apparently be proved prejudicial to ſuch a ſociety.

I come unprejudiced to the queſtion, and when I have promiſed you an anſwer to your future Letters in ſupport of revelation, I have neither anticipated your argument nor prejudged the cauſe. I hold myſelf open to be convinced, and if I am convinced I ſhall ſay ſo, which is equally anſwering as if I denied the force of your obſervations. In that ſenſe only I promiſe an anſwer. If I believe I ſhall ſay I do; but I ſhall not believe and tremble, confident as I am, that if I act an honeſt part in life, whether there be a Deity and a future exiſtence or not, whatever reaſon I may have to rejoice in caſe ſuch ideas be realiſed, I can upon ſuch an iſſue have none to tremble. I look upon myſelf to have more reaſon to be temporally afraid than eternally ſo. Dr. Prieſtley or any other Doctor can put his name boldly to a book in favour of Theiſm, loudly call the ſupporters of a contrary doctrine to the argument, and if no anſwer is produced, aſſert their own reaſoning

ing to be unanſwerable. In that ſenſe their ſort of reaſoning has been frequently unanſwerable. Here however is an inſtauce of a poor unknown individual, making experience of the candour of the eccleſiaſtics and the equity of the laws of England, for he ventures to ſubſcribe his publication with his name as well as Dr. Prieſtley does his Letters, to which this publication is an anſwer. Perhaps he may have cauſe to repent of his hardineſs, but if he has, he is equally reſolved to glory in his martyrdom, as to ſuffer it. Whatever advantage religion has had in the enumeration of it's martyrs, the cauſe of atheiſm may boaſt the ſame. As to the inſtances of the profeſſors of any particular form of religion, or modification of that form, ſuch as Chriſtians or ſects of Chriſtians, ſuffering martyrdom for their belief, I ſhall no more allow them to be martyrs for theiſm than Pagans ſimilarly ſuffering for their belief, ſhall I call martyrs for atheiſm. Theiſm very likely has had it's martyrs. I can inſtance one I think in Socrates, and I ſhall mention Vanini as a martyr for atheiſm. The conduct of thoſe two great men in their laſt moments may be worth attending to. The variety of other poor heretical wretches, who have been immolated at the ſhrine of abſurdity for all the poſſible

poſſible errors of human credence, let them have their legendary fame. I put them out of the ſcale in this important inquiry.

Not that I really think the argument to be much advanced by naming the great ſupporters of one opinion or of another. In mathematics, mechanics, natural philoſophy, in literature, taſte, and politics the ſentiments of great men of great genius are certainly of weight. There are ſome ſubjects capable of demonſtration, many indeed which the ingenuity of one man can go farther to illuſtrate than that of another. The force of high authority is greater in the three former ſciences than in the latter. Theiſm and Atheiſm I hold to be neither of them ſtrictly demonſtrable. You, Dr. Prieſtley, agree with me in that. Still I hold the queſtion capable of being illuſtrated by argument, and I ſhould hold the authority of great men's names to be of more weight in this ſubject, were I not neceſſarily forced to conſider that all education is ſtrongly calculated to ſupport the idea of a Deity; by this education prejudice is introdueed, and prejudice is nothing elſe than a corruption of the underſtanding. Certain principles, call them, if you pleaſe, data, muſt be agreed

agreed upon before any reaſoning can take place. Diſputants muſt at laſt agree in the ideas which they annex to the language they uſe. But when prejudice has made a ſtand, argumentation is ſet at ſo wide a diſtance, through a want of fixt data to proceed upon, that attention is in vain applied to the diſpute. Beſides, the nature of the ſubject upon which this prejudice takes place, is ſuch, that the moſt genius is nearly equally liable to an undue bias with the moſt vulgar. To queſtion with boldneſs and indifference, whether an individual, all-forming, all-ſeeing and all-governing Being exiſts, to whom, if he exiſts, we may poſſibly be reſponſible for our actions, whoſe intelligence and power muſt be infinitely ſuperior to our own, requires a great conqueſt of former habitude, a firmneſs of nerves, as well as of underſtanding; it will therefore be no great wonder, if ſuch men as Locke and Newton can be named among the believers in a Deity. They were chriſtians as well as theiſts, ſo that their authority goes as far in one reſpect as in the other. But if the opinions of men of great genius are to have weight, what is to be ſaid of modern men of genius? You, Sir, are of opinion that the world is getting wiſer as well as better. There is all the reaſon in the world

why

why it ſhould get wiſer at leaſt, ſince wiſdom is only a collection of experience, and there muſt be more experience as the world is older. Modern Philoſophers are nearly all atheiſts. I take the term atheiſt here in the popular ſenſe. Hume, Helvetius, Diderot, D'Almbert. Can they not weigh againſt Locke and Newton, and even more than Locke and Newton, ſince their ſtore of knowledge and learning was at hand to be added to their own, and among them are thoſe who ſingly poſſeſſed equal ſcience in mathematics as in metaphyſics? It is not impoſſible, perhaps not improbable, from his courſe of learning and inquiries, that if Dr. Prieſtley had not from his firſt initiation into ſcience been dedicated for what is called the immediate ſervice of God, he himſelf might have been one of the greateſt diſprovers of his pretended divinity.

In England you think, Sir, that atheiſm is not prevalent among men of free reaſoning, though you acknowledge it to be much ſo in other countries. It is not the firſt time it has been obſerved that the greater the ſuperſtition of the common people the leſs is that of men of letters. In the heart of the Papal territories perhaps is the greateſt number of atheiſts, and in the reformed countries

tries the greateſt number of deiſts. Yet it is a common obſervation, eſpecially by divines, that deiſm leads to atheiſm, and I believe the obſervation is well founded. I hardly need explain here, that by deiſm in this ſenſe is meant a belief in the exiſtence of a Deity from natural and philoſophical principles, and a diſbelief in all immediate revelation by the Deity of his own exiſtence. Such is the force of habit, that it is by degrees only that even men of ſenſe and firmneſs ſhake off one prejudice after another. They begin by getting rid of the abſurdities of all popular religions. This leaves them ſimple deiſts; but the force of reaſoning next carries them a ſtep farther, and whoever truſts to this reaſoning, devoid of all fear and prejudice, is very likely to end at laſt in being an atheiſt. Nor do I admit it to be an argument either for Revelation or Natural Religion, that the ſame turn for ſpeculation that would convert a chriſtian into a theiſt, will carry him on to be an atheiſt, though I know the argument has been often uſed. If upon ſick beds or in dying moments men revert to their old weakneſs and ſuperſtitions, their falling off may afford triumph to religioniſts; for my part I care not ſo much for the opinions of ſick and dying men, as of thoſe

who at the time are ſtrong and healthy. But in the opinions of the one or the other I put no great ſtreſs. My faith is in reaſoning, for though ridicule is not a complete teſt of truth, reaſoning I hold certainly to be ſo. I own belief may be impreſt on the mind otherwiſe than by the force of reaſon. The mind may be diſeaſed. All I ſhall ſay is, that though I have formerly believed many things without reaſon, and even many againſt it, as is very common, I hope I ſhall never more. My mind (I was going to ſay, thank God) is ſane at preſent, and I intend to keep it ſo. I am aware that at the expreſſion juſt uſed ſome will exclaim in triumph, that the poor wretch could not help thinking of his God at the ſame time he was denying him. The obſervation would hold good, if it were not that we often ſpeak and write unpremeditately, and though what is in this manner unpremeditately expreſſed upon a reviſion ſhould be certainly expunged, yet I chuſe to leave the expreſſion to ſhew the force of habit.

In fear lies the origin of all fancied deities, whether ſole or numberleſs.

Primus in orbe Deos fecit Timor.

But the greateſt debaſement of the human mind is

is evidenced in the inſtance of attributing a merit to belief, which has come at laſt to be ſtiled a virtue, and is dignified by the name of faith, that moſt pitiful of all human qualities. When the apoſtle ſpoke of faith, hope and charity, he might as well have exclaimed the leaſt of the three is faith, as the greateſt is charity.

One enthuſiaſt cries out *un Roi* and another *un Dieu.* The reality of the king I admit, becauſe I feel his power. Againſt my feeling and my experience I cannot argue, for upon theſe ſenſations is built all argument. But not all the wondrous works of the creation, as I hear the viſible operations of nature called, convince me in the leaſt of the exiſtence of a Deity. By nature I mean to expreſs the whole of what I ſee and feel, that whole, I call ſelf-exiſtent from all eternity; I admit a principle of intelligence and deſign, but I deny that principle to be extraneous from itſelf. My creed in fine is the ſame with that of the Roman poet;

"*Deus eſt ubicunque movemur.*"

If then I am admitted to explain my deity in this ſenſe, I am not an atheiſt, nor can any one elſe in

the world be ſuch. The *vis naturæ*, the perpetual induſtry, intelligence and proviſion of nature muſt be apparent to all who ſee, feel or think. I mean to diſtinguiſh this active, intelligent and deſigning principle, inherent as much in matter as the properties of gravity or any elaſtic, attractive or repulſive power, from any extraneous foreign force and deſign in an inviſible agent, ſupreme though hidden lord and maſter over all effects and appearances that preſent themſelves to us in the courſe of nature. The laſt ſuppoſition makes the univerſe and all other organiſed matter a machine made or contrived by the arbitrary will of another Being, which other Being is called God; and my theory makes a God of this univerſe, or admits no other God or deſigning principle than matter itſelf and its various organiſations.

The inquiry is ſaid to be important. But why is it ſo! All truth is important. It is a queſtion of little importance, merely whether a man had a maker or no, although it is of great importance to diſprove the exiſtence of ſuch a Deity as theologians wiſh to eſtabliſh, becauſe appearances in the world go againſt it. Suppoſing however that it was granted, that the queſtion, whether there is a Deity

a Deity or not, was as little important as other truths, yet the queſtion becomes important with this reflexion, that other events may follow as deductions; ſuch as a particular providence, or a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments; but whether ſuch deductions or either of them neceſſarily follow may well be queried. As to a particular providence you give up the reality of it, and I give it up too. But I cannot give up the argument, that if there were a God with all his allowed attributes of wiſdom, power and juſtice, there ought to be a particular providence to counteract the general laws of nature, in favour of thoſe who deſerve the interpoſition. Though the Deity ſhould not interfere unleſs there be a worthy cauſe, agreeable to the Horation rule,

" *Nec Deus interſit niſi dignus vindice nodus;*"

Yet ſurely from the ſame principles it ſhould follow that the Deity ought to interfere where there is a worthy cauſe. Here however ariſes another dilemma, for if the Deity has really thoſe attributes of power and juſtice, there would never have been occaſion for ſuch temperaneous interpoſitions. A particular providence muſt indeed prove one of theſe two principles, either that God was imperfect

imperfect in his design, or that inert matter is inimical to the properties of God. If that wished for interposition of the Deity is put off to a future existence, I cannot help observing, that future day has been already a long while waited for in vain, and any delay destroys some one attribute or other of the Deity. He wants justice, or he wants the power, or the will to do good and be just. That a future state of rewards and punishments may however exist without a Deity, you, Dr. Priestley, allow to be no impossibility. It may indeed be argued with apparent justness, that a principle of revivifcence may as well be admitted as a principle of production in the first instance: and as to rewards and punishments, judgement may be rendered, as well as now, by Beings less than Deities. For my part I firmly wish for such a future state, and though I cannot firmly believe it, I am resolved to live as if such a state were to ensue. This seems, I own, like doubting, and doubting may be said to be a miserable state of anxiety. "Better be confident than unhinged; better confide in ignorance than have no fixed system." So it may be argued; but I think the result will be as people feel. Those who do not feel bold enough, to be satisfied with their own thoughts, may abandon them

them and adopt the thoughts of others. For my part I am content with my own; and not the leſs ſo becauſe they do not end in certainty upon matters, from the nature of them, beyond the complete reach of human intelligence.

There is nothing in fact important to human nature but happineſs, which is or ought to be the end or aim of our being. I mean ſelf-happineſs; but fortunately for mankind, ſuch is by nature our conſtruction, that we cannot individually be happy unleſs we join alſo in promoting the happineſs of others. Should immorality, timidity or other baſe principles ariſe from atheiſm it tends immediately, I will own, to the unhappineſs of mankind. If it is aſked me, "why am I honeſt and honourable?" I anſwer, becauſe of the ſatisfaction I have in being ſo. "Do all people receive that ſatisfaction?" No, many who are ill educated, ill-exampled and perverted, do not. I do, that is enough for me. In ſhort, I am well conſtructed, and I feel I can therefore act an honeſt and honourable part without any religious motive. Did I perceive, that belief in a Deity produced morality or inſpired courage, I might be prompted to confeſs, that the contrary would enſue from atheiſm.

But

But the bulk of the world has long believed, or long pretended to believe in a Deity, yet morality and every commendable quality ſeem at a ſtand. The believer and the unbeliever we often ſee equally baſe, equally immoral. Superſtition is certainly only the exceſs of religion. That evidently is attended often with immorality and cowardice. I am tempted to ſay, from obſervation, that the belief of a Deity is apt to drive mankind into vice and baſeneſs; but I check myſelf in the aſſertion, upon conſidering that very few indeed are thoſe who really believe in a Deity out of ſuch as pretend to do ſo. It is impoſſible for an intellectual being to believe firmly in that of which he can give no account, or of which he can form no conception. I hold the Deity, the fancied Deity at leaſt, of whom with all his attributes ſuch pompous deſcriptions are ſet forth to the great terror of old women and the amuſement of young children, to be an object of which we form (as appears when we ſcrutiniſe into our ideas) no conception and therefore can give no account. It is ſaid, after all this, that men do ſtill believe in ſuch a Deity, I then do ſay in return, they do not make uſe of their intellects. The moment we go into a belief beyond what we feel, ſee and underſtand, we might as well believe in

in will-with-a-whiſp as in God. But I would fix morality upon a better baſis than belief in a Deity. If it has indeed at preſent no other baſis, it is not morality, it is ſelfiſhneſs, it is timidity; it is the hope of reward, it is the dread of puniſhment. For a great and good man, ſhew me one who loves virtue becauſe he finds a pleaſure in it, who has acquired a taſte for that pleaſure by conſidering what and where happineſs is, who is not ſuch a fool as to ſeek miſery in preference to happineſs, whoſe honour is his Deity, whoſe conſcience is his judge. Put ſuch a man in combat againſt the ſuperſtitious ſon of Spain or Portugal, it were eaſy to ſay who would ſhew the trueſt courage. The queſtion might be more voluminouſly diſcuſſed, but I feel already proof of conviction; if you, Dr. Prieſtley, do not, perhaps ſome other readers may. I have nothing to do with men of low minds. They will always have their religion or pretence of it, but I am miſtaken if it is not the gallows or the pillory that more govern their morals than the goſpel or the pulpit.

After all, atheiſm may be a ſyſtem only for the learned. The ignorant of all ages have believed in God. The anſwer of a Philoſophical Un-

believer though written in the vulgar tongue may probably not reach the vulgar. If argument had prevailed they were long converted from their ſuperſtitious belief. The ſentiments of atheiſtical philoſophers have long been publiſhed. If miſchief therefore could enſue to ſociety from ſuch free diſcuſſions, that miſchief ſociety muſt long have felt. I think truth ſhould never be hid, but few are thoſe who mind it. I will therefore take upon myſelf but little importance though I have preſumed to preface an anſwer from a Philoſophical Unbeliever to Letters which you, Dr. Prieſtley have written. If you deem that anſwer detrimental to the intereſts of ſociety, you will recollect that you invite the propoſal of objections and promiſe to anſwer all as well as you can. If you ſhould happen to be exaſperated by the freedom of the language or the contrariety of the ſentiment, this anſwer will gain weight in proportion as you loſe in the credit of a tolerant Divine. Therefore if you reply at all, reply with candour and with coolneſs; heed the matter and not the man, though I ſubſcribe my name, and am

Reverend Sir,

Your friend, admirer,

Oxford-Street, No. 418. and humble ſervant,

Jan. 1, 1782. WILLIAM HAMMON.

ANSWER

FROM A

PHILOSOPHICAL UNBELIEVER.

IT is the general faſhion to believe in a God, the maker of all things, or at leaſt to pretend to ſuch a belief, to define the nature of this exiſting Deity by the attributes which are given to him, to place the foundation of morality on this belief, and in idea at leaſt, to connect the welfare of civil ſociety with the acknowledgement of ſuch a Being. Few however are thoſe, who being queſtioned can give any tolerable grounds for their aſſertions upon this ſubject, and hardly any two among the learned agree in their manner of proving what each will ſeparately hold to be indiſputably clear. The attributes of a Deity are more generally agreed

upon, though leſs the ſubject of proof, than his exiſtence. As to morality, thoſe very people who are moral will not deny, they would be ſo though there were not a God, and there never yet has been a civil lawgiver, who left crimes to be puniſhed by the author of the univerſe; not even the profanation of oaths upon the ſacredneſs of which ſo much is built in ſociety, and which yet is ſaid to be a more immediate offence againſt the Deity than any other that can be named.

The method which Dr. Prieſtley has taken to prove the exiſtence of a God, is by arguing from *effect* to *cauſe*. He explodes that other pretended proof *a priori* which has ſo much raiſed the fame of Dr. Clarke among other theologians. As to the attributes of the Deity, Dr. Prieſtley is not quite ſo confident in his proofs there; and the moſt amiable one, the moſt by mortals to be wiſhed for, the *benevolence* of God he almoſt gives up, or owns at leaſt there is not ſo much proof of it as of his other attributes. His obſervations are divided into ſeveral Letters, this is one anſwer given to the whole; for it would be to no purpoſe to reply to topics upon which the writers are agreed. What therefore is not contradicted here, Dr. Prieſtley may

may in general take to be allowed; but to obviate doubts and to allow his argument every force, it may be fairer perhaps to recite at full length what in this anſwer is allowed to be true, what is denied as falſe, what meant to be expoſed as abſurd, and what rejected as aſſertions without proof, inadmiſſible or inconcluſive. The concluſion will contain ſome obſervations upon the whole.

TRUISMS.

1. "Effects have their adequate cauſes."

2. "Nothing begins to exiſt without a cauſe foreign to itſelf."

3. "No being could make himſelf, for that would imply that he exiſted and did not exiſt at the ſame time."

4. "If one horſe, or one tree, had a cauſe, all had."

5. Something

5. Something muſt have exiſted from all eternity,

6. "Atoms cannot be arranged, in a manner expreſſive of the moſt exquiſite deſign, without competent intelligence having exiſted ſomewhere."

7. "The idea of a ſupreme author is more pleaſing to a virtuous mind, than that of a blind fate and fatherleſs deſerted world."

8. "The condition of mankind is in a ſtate of melioration, as far as miſery ariſes from ignorance, for as the world grows older it muſt grow wiſer, if wiſdom ariſes from experience."

9. "All moral virtue is only a modification of benevolence."

10. "Virtue gives a better chance for happineſs than vice."

11. "No inſtance of any revival."

12. "Atheiſts are not to think themſelves quite ſecure with reſpect to a future life."

13. "Thought

13. "Thought might as well depend upon the conſtruction of the brain, as upon any inviſible ſubſtance extraneous to the brain."

14. "If the works of God had a beginning, there muſt have been a time when he was inactive."

15. "Where happineſs is wanting in the creation I would rather conclude the author had miſt of his deſign than that he wanted benevolence.

FALSE ASSERTIONS.

1. "A cauſe needs not be prior to an effect."

2. "If the ſpecies of man had no beginning, it would not follow that it had no cauſe."

3. "A cauſe may be cotemporary with the effect."

4. "An

4. "An atheiſt muſt believe he was introduced into the world without deſign."

ABSURDITIES.

1. "A general maſs of ſenſation conſiſting of various elements borrowed from the paſt and the future."

2. "Since ſenſation is made up of paſt, preſent, and future, the infant feeling for the moment only, the man recollecting what is paſt and anticipating the future, and as the preſent ſenſation muſt therefore in time bear a leſs proportion to the general maſs of ſenſation than it did, ſo at laſt all temporary affections, whether of pain or pleaſure become wholly inconſiderable."

3. "The great book of nature and the book of revelation both lie open before us."

4. "A concluſion above our comprehenſion."

5. "A

5. " A whole eternity already paſt."

6. " Since a finite Being cannot be infinitely happy, becauſe he muſt then be infinite in knowledge and power ; and as all limitation of happineſs muſt conſiſt in degree of happineſs or mixture of miſery, the Deity can alone determine which mode of limitation is beſt."

7. " We have reaſon to be thankful for our pains and diſtreſſes."

8. " If the divine Being had made man at firſt as happy as he can be after all the feelings and ideas of a painful and laborious life, it muſt have been in violation of all general laws and by a conſtant and momentary interference of the Deity."

9. " It is better the divine agency ſhould not be very conſpicuous."

10. " If good prevails on the whole, creation being infinite, happineſs will be infinite, and God comprehending the whole, will only perceive the

balance of good, and that will be happineſs unmixed with miſery."

11. "If a man is happy in the whole he is infinitely happy in the whole of his exiſtence."

12. "Although all things fall alike to all men and no diſtinction is made between the righteous and the wicked, and even though the wicked derive an advantage from their vices, yet this is conſiſtent with a ſtate of moral government by a Being of infinite wiſdom and power."

13. "As ploughing is the means of having a harveſt, though God has predetermined whether there ſhould be a harveſt or not, ſo prayer is the means of obtaining good from God, although that good is predetermined upon; It is therefore no more abſurd to pray than to plough."

14. "Notwithſtanding happineſs is the neceſſary conſequence of health, yet man's happineſs is more from intellectual than corporeal feelings."

15. "Evil is neceſſarily connected with and ſubſervient to good, although in the next world there will be all good and no evil."

16. "By

16. "By reaſon we can diſcover the neceſſary exiſtence of a Deity, yet to be a ſceptic on that ſubject is the firſt ſtep to be a Chriſtian, becauſe reaſon not ſufficiently proving it we fly to revealed truth."

17. "The power, which a man has by the comprehenſiveneſs of his mind to enjoy the future, has no apparent limits."

18. "It is of no avail in the argument concerning the exiſtence of a Deity, that we have no conception of him, ſince it does not imply impoſſibility of his exiſtence that we have no idea at all upon the ſubject."

INADMISSIBLE OR INCONCLUSIVE.

1. "The queſtion of the exiſtence of a Deity is important."

2. "A Theiſt has a higher ſenſe of perſonal dignity than an atheiſt."

3. "The conduct of an atheist must give concern to those who are not so."

4. "An atheist believes himself to be, at his death, for ever excluded from returning life."

5. "There are more atheists than unbelievers in revelation."

6. "Men of letters may have the same bias to incredulity as others to credulity, because they are subject to a wrong association of ideas, as well as other persons though in a less degree."

7. "Whoever first made a thing, for example a chair or a table, must have had an adequate idea of it's nature and use."

8. "If a table had a designing cause, the tree from whence the wood came, and the man who made the table must have had a designing cause, which comprehended all the powers and properties of trees and men."

9. "All

9. " All the viſible univerſe, as far as we can judge, bears the marks of being one work, and therefore muſt have had a cauſe of infinite power and intelligence."

10. " We might as well ſay a table had no cauſe, as that the world had none."

11. " A Being originally and neceſſarily capable of comprehending itſelf, it is not improper to call infinite, for we can have no idea of any bounds to it's knowledge or power."

12. " A ſeries of finite cauſes cannot poſſibly be carrid back *ad infinitum*."

13. " Our imagination revolts at the idea of an intellectual ſoul of the univerſe, that is, of an intelligence reſulting from arrangement."

14. " The actual exiſtence of the univerſe compels us to come at laſt to an *originally exiſtent and intellectual Being*, becauſe if the immediate maker of the univerſe has not exiſted from all eternity, he muſt have derived his being and ſenſes from one who has, and that being we call God."

15. " God

15. "God muſt be preſent to all his works, if we admit no power can act but where it is, he muſt therefore exiſt every where, becauſe his works are every where."

16. "As no being can unmake or materially change himſelf (at leaſt none can annihilate himſelf) ſo God is unchangeable, for no Being God made can change him and no other Being can exiſt but what God made.

17. "Two infinite intelligent Beings of the ſame kind would coincide, therefore there can only be one God."

18. "Nothing can be more evident, than that plants and animals could not have proceeded from each other from all eternity."

19. "That happineſs is the deſign of the creation, becauſe health is deſigned and ſickneſs is only an exception, not a general rule is as evident as that the deſign of the Mill-wright muſt have been, that his machine ſhould not be obſtructed."

20. "As

20. "As a ſtate of ſickneſs is comparatively rare with a ſtate of health, happineſs the reſult of health, and the end of the creation happineſs, ſo the end of the creation is already in a great meaſure anſwered."

21. "Pleaſure tends to continue and propagate itſelf, pain to check and exterminate itſelf."

22. "As our knowledge and power in reſpect to ſhunning pains and procuring pleaſures advance with our experience, nothing is wanting to enable us to exterminate all pains, but a continuance of being.

23. "Our enjoyments continually increaſe in real value from infancy to old age."

24. "A future moral diſtribution is probable, becauſe God is infinitely powerful and wiſe."

25. "Since reverence, gratitude, obedience, confidence are duties to men, ſo they are to God; and as we pray to men, ſo we ſhould pray to God."

26. "Pre-

26. "Prefcience, predetermination and infinite benevolence are no argument againſt prayer to the Deity."

27. "A wiſh produced by nature is evidence of the thing wiſhed for, but a future ſtate is wiſhed for, therefore there is evidence of a future ſtate."

28. "As we have no idea how we came originally to be produced, for what we know to the contrary our reproduction may be as much the courſe of nature as our original production."

29. "A gloom and melancholy belong more to atheiſts than to devout people."

OBSERVATIONS.

Dr. Prieſtley will hardly doubt, after this collection from his work that it has at leaſt been read before it is attempted to be anſwered. It is in the

the writer's power to quote the page and line for each aſſertion, but it would be ſtuffing this publication with unneceſſary references. Dr. Prieſtley will be able to know what are his own ſentiments and what not without recurring to his printed Letters. There has been alſo another difficulty in claſſing the ſeveral exceptions under the different heads; what is falſe, what is abſurd, and what is inadmiſſible bordering ſo nearly on each other. Nice diſtinctions cannot in ſuch reſpect be made, but the whole together form the main argument which is to be anſwered.

The firſt and principal aſſertion is, that effects have their adequate cauſes; it is then added, that the univerſe is an effect, that it therefore muſt have a cauſe, and to this cauſe in the Engliſh language is given the name of God. This propoſition is true, provided the univerſe is an effect, but that is a *poſtulatum* without conceſſion and without a proof. This *original Being* he advances in another place to be that only ſomething which exiſted uncauſed from all eternity, and which could not have been a Being, like a man or a table, incapable of comprehending itſelf, for ſuch exiſtences would require another ſuperior Being. But if

the univerſe is not adopted as an effect, if it is taken as exiſting from all eternity, the univerſe becomes an intelligent Being, and there or no where is the Deity ſought after. Such a Being we may properly ſpeak of and reaſon upon. The whole is ſubjected to our ſenſations and our experience. But of his own *uncauſed Being* Dr. P. ſays we cannot properly ſpeak. Is not that alone an argument of there being no ſuch thing? His friend Dr. Clarke ſays, we cannot have an idea of an impoſſible thing. Now this diſcovered Deity is allowed to be that of which we can have no idea. So far at leaſt it is allied to the impoſſible.

As to the argument of cauſe and effect, the latter certainly implies the former; but when we give the name of effect to any thing, we muſt be certain it is an effect, for we may be ſo far miſtaken perhaps as to call that an effect which is a cauſe, at leaſt what is an effect to-day may be a cauſe to-morrow, as in the inſtance of generation; for though a ſon does not beget his father, he too has his offſpring in which he may be ſaid to live over again, and if we are to argue only from experience, moſt probably that alone is the reſurrection and the life to come. But if it is contended that

that our experience relates only to finite cauſes, or cauſes incapable of comprehending themſelves, it muſt at the ſame time be allowed, that all our reaſoning is founded only on experience. This Dr. P. at leaſt allows even while he keeps reaſoning about a Deity, which he calls an infinite cauſe capable of comprehending itſelf, though nobody is capable of comprehending it, and of which we therefore can have no experience. Yet he will aſſert, that *thinking* perſons ſeldom are convinced by *thinking*. This is odd language for a reaſoner. When another philoſopher or divine attempts to prove a God in their own way, Dr. Prieſtley can readily ſee his fallacies and abſurdities. Dr. Clarke, the former great champion of God Almighty, is made very light of. He thought, fooliſh man, to prove the exiſtence of a Deity merely by our having an idea of that exiſtence, which would go to prove the truth of every unnatural conceit that ever entered into the heart of man; and contended farther that it would be equally abſurd to ſuppoſe no Deity as that two and two did not make four. It would indeed be abſurd, ſays Dr. Prieſtley provided we agreed that the univerſe is a *cauſed* exiſtence, for God is the name we give for the cauſe of the univerſe, which in ſuch caſe muſt exiſt. It

is only denying that the univerſe is a cauſed exiſtence, and then the abſurdity is taken away. Dr. Prieſtley, for the ſake of making Dr. Clarke abſurd, will readily allow the denial capable of being made; and for the ſame purpoſe he ſeems gravely to have taken upon himſelf to prove that ſchool-boy's difficulty, that two and two do make four; for he ſays, that four is the term agreed upon in language to be given to the ſum total of two and two, and that to deny the Deity is at leaſt not ſo abſurd as to ſay that two and two do not make four.

Dr. Prieſtley ſays he finds no difficulty in excluding every thing from the mind except ſpace and duration. He allows then at leaſt, that there is no manifeſt abſurdity in ſuppoſing there is no Deity, for nothing can be proved by reaſoning if the concluſion can be denied without abſurdity, nor can there be a manifeſt abſurdity in denying the exiſtence of what there is no difficulty in excluding from the mind. Yet after all he adds (ſomewhat inconſiſtently) that we cannot exclude the idea of a Deity, if we do not exclude an exiſtent univerſe. This Deity he defines to be a moſt ſimple

ſimple Being; ſimple and infinite; terms which but ill agree together.

The infinite or boundleſs exiſtence of this pretended Deity is a property more inſiſted upon than any other, and whatever other properties are given to him they are all in the infinite degree. The properties alledged to be proved are, eternity, infinite knowledge and power, unchangeableneſs, unity, omnipotence, action from all eternity, and independence. Benevolence and moral government are alſo aſcribed to him, but confeſſedly with a leſs degree of certainty, though the moſt deſireable of all his given properties. Upon the ſubject of benevolence, Dr. Prieſtley only advances, that where it is not proved by the happineſs of his creatures to exiſt, he would rather chuſe to conclude he miſt of his deſign; that is, he wanted power or knowledge, than that he wanted benevolence. If he means to argue that it is more rational to conclude this Deity wanted power and knowledge than that he wanted benevolence, and becauſe Dr. Prieſtley fancies himſelf to have proved the Deity cannot want the two former, he concludes the Deity cannot want the latter, as the leſs probable for him to be deficient in, his argument

is

is no more a truiſm. As a wiſh, that the Deity may not want benevolence, in that ſenſe let him take it as agreed upon. He allows that miſery in the human ſpecies proves malevolence in the Deity, and happineſs the contrary. All the proof adduced in favour of benevolence is in aſſerting that, throughout the univerſe, good is more predominant than evil. The infinite extent of benevolence he will allow incapable of proof; but then it is ſaid that the evils which mankind endure are not ſo great as might be inflicted upon them; that virtue to vice, happineſs to miſery, health to ſickneſs bear at leaſt equal proportions. That leſſer evils exiſt inſtead of greater is indeed but a poor proof in the favour of the benevolence of an all-powerful Being. Or grant, that good is more predominant than evil, this ſurely is no proof neither of the benevolence of a kind and all-powerful Being. Yet Dr. Prieſtley adds that the general benevolence of the Deity is unqueſtionable. How unqueſtionable? It is queſtioned by the author himſelf, and he declares he cannot prove it. After this he aſks, who will pretend to dictate to ſuch a Being? He might in the ſame ſtile conclude that no objection deſerved a reply. The whole of this is abſurd; but when the Doctor

begins

begins to feel enthuſiaſm he is like the reſt of the eccleſiaſtical arguers. They reaſon themſelves into imaginary Beings with more imaginary properties and then fall down and worſhip them. God is ſaid to have made man in the image of himſelf. If he has done ſo, man is up with him, for he in return makes God in his own image. Much as the imagination of one man differs from another, ſo differs the God of each devotee. They are all idolaters or anthropomorphites to a man; there is none but an atheiſt that is not the one or the other.

The admiſſion of evil into the world is an argument ſo exceedingly concluſive againſt at leaſt a good Deity, that it is curious to ſee how Dr. Prieſtley ſtudies to get rid of that difficulty. He partly denies the fact, at leaſt he ſays there is more good than evil in the world. At laſt he even turns evil into good, or what ought to be the effects of one, into what ought to be the effects of the other, as he ſays pain is neceſſary for happineſs. But if pain is, as he ſays, in this world neceſſary for happineſs, why will it not ſtill be neceſſary hereafter? He anſwers, becauſe by that time we ſhall have experienced pain enough for a future ſupply of happineſs. If it is objected, why

why have we not had pain enough by the time each of us are twenty or thirty years of age, inſtead of waiting 'till our deaths at ſo many different ages? He can only finiſh his argument by allowing that the ways of God are inſcrutable to man, that every thing is for the beſt and refer us to *Candide* for the reſt of his philoſophy; nor will he ever reſolve the queſtion, "if evil and pain are good and neceſſary now, why will they not always be ſo? Take a view of human exiſtence, and who can even allow, that there is more happineſs than miſery in the world? Dr. Prieſtley thinks to give the turn of the ſcale to happineſs, by making it depend intirely upon health, notwithſtanding he ſays in another place that human ſenſations are a maſs collected from the paſt, preſent and future, and as a man grows up the preſent goes on to bear a leſs proportion to the other two. It would indeed be a ſhort but lame way of proving that "happineſs is the deſign of the creation" becauſe health is deſigned, and ſickneſs is only an exception, not a general rule." Many a healthy man has certainly been unhappy, or elſe had a man better ſtudy health than virtue. If the mill-wright make a poor machine he is a poor workman; God in like manner deſigning health and

and introducing ſickneſs is but a poor phyſician. In another place Dr. Prieſtley having conſidered, that he had aſſerted that human ſenſations ariſe from ideas of the paſt and future as well as the preſent, finds himſelf obliged to alter his notions of happineſs, ſo far as to ſay that happineſs is more intellectual than corporeal. But it is rather extraordinary to aſſert at the ſame time, that happineſs is the neceſſary conſequence of health, and that happineſs is more from intellectual than corporeal feelings. Surely health, if any thing, is corporeal. Another curious fancy about pain and happineſs is, that our finite nature not admitting infinite or unlimited happineſs we muſt leave it to the wiſdom of the Deity to determine which is beſt for us (ſince happineſs muſt be diminiſhed) a little pain to be added to it or ſomewhat of happineſs to be taken away. It hardly requires the ſkill of a benevolent Deity to determine which is beſt for the creatures he has made (and whom he wiſhes to be as happy as their finite nature will admit) to leſſen their degree of happineſs or mix therein a proportion of miſery. To conclude he aſks, "how it is poſſible to teach children caution, but by feeling pain?" It is eaſy to allow in anſwer, that it might not perhaps be poſſible in us. But

he is arguing about the benevolence of a Deity. It was poſſible, he will allow, in him to have given theſe children knowledge without pain, at leaſt if he continues to him the attribute he allows of omnipotence.

Next he obſerves that parents ſuſpend at times their benefits to their off-pring, when perſuaded they are not for their good; ſo does the Deity. But before this argument holds he muſt therefore ſay, it is not for the good of man to be made happy now, and that the Deity can be infinitely benevolent without willing either infinite or univerſal happineſs. Take the argument any way, it muſt go againſt his benevolence or his power; and the ſame obſervations hold as to his love of juſtice, whilſt he is ſo tardy in puniſhing offenders.

After obſerving, that things are in an improving ſtate, Dr. Prieſtley allows, that the moral government of the univerſe is not perfect. From thence he proceeds to aſſert, that atheiſts may believe it within the courſe of nature, that men as moral agents may after death be re-produced, and therefore that there may be a future ſtate though there be no God, becauſe he reaſons it may be in the

the courſe of nature. This allows that the courſe of nature may be as it is without a God, and that there is therefore no *natural* proof of a Deity. His farther argument on this head is, that "things uſually happen in a ſtate of nature that are proper. A future ſtate is proper. (To carry on the ſuppoſed ſtate of melioration and complete the moral government of the univerſe.) It is therefore probable." This is an argument perhaps more of wiſh than probability, but let it have ſuch force as belongs to it. It is not the wiſh of the anſwerer by ſupporting atheiſm to give encouragement to immorality, but ſhould he unwarily or with weak minds do ſo, the argument of the Deity's exiſtence is independent of ſuch conſiderations. It were better to ſeek another ſupport for morality than a belief in God; for the moral purpoſe in believing a Deity (an inviſible Being, maker of all, our moral governor, who will hereafter take cognizance of our conduct,) is not a little checked by conſidering, that he leaves the proof of his very exiſtence ſo ambiguous, that even men with a habit of piety upon them cannot but have their doubts, whilſt on this exiſtence ſo much of the moral purpoſe depends. If this is not on argument againſt the morality of a Deity,

it is at all events one againſt his *infinite* morality; though moral is an attribute to be given to him in the infinite degree as much as any other.

It is ſaid, infinite intelligence muſt have procured a neceſſary fitneſs of things, and that his forms morality. "His will could not be biaſſed by other influence; therefore he muſt have willed morality, becauſe neceſſarily fit." Then comes infinite power, and yet no morality in the world or a very ſmall portion of it. We cannot to any purpoſe, do what we will, argue againſt experience. That it muſt be, yet that it is not. What *muſt* be, will be. If it is not, there is no *muſt* in the caſe.

It is next ſaid, that virtue gives a better chance for happineſs than vice. This alſo is but a weak argument for the moral government of the univerſe, unleſs it be for a moral government by chance. Virtue ought to be the certain and immediate parent of happineſs, if a moral governor exiſted with an uncontrouled dominion. If virtue tends to happineſs, or has only a better chance of doing ſo, it is allowed that a ſenſible atheiſt ſhould hold it right to be virtuous. The latter end of a righteous

ous man is certainly more likely to be happy than that of an unrighteous one. But let an atheiſt be righteous, and he can be as certain of happineſs in his latter end as any other. Let another life be deſirable, as it certainly is, his doubts upon it will not prevent it. Who could wiſh an end better or more happy than that of Mr. Hume, who moſt indubitably was an atheiſt. But if an atheiſt be not ſo good as a Theiſt, Dr. Prieſtley, perhaps, will allow him to be better than a ſceptic, as any principles for ſyſtematiſing nature are better than none at all. A Theiſt is not without his doubts as well as the ſceptic; an atheiſt, once firmly becoming ſo, will never doubt more; for we may venture to ſay no miracles or new appearances will preſent themſelves to him to draw his belief aſide.

Still every thing is as God intended it—ſo aſſerts Dr. Prieſtley; and therefore it cannot by him be denied that crimes and vices are of his intention. The Theiſt exclaims in triumph, "He that made the eye, muſt he not ſee?" But who made the eye? Or grant that God made the eye, which can only ſee in the light, muſt he neceſſarily ſee in the dark? It is again aſſerted, "the power

power which formed an eye, had ſomething in view as certainly as he that conſtructed a teleſcope." If any Being formed any eye, grant it. But if the eye exiſts neceſſarily as a part of nature, as much as any other matter, or combination of matter, neceſſarily exiſted, the reſult of the argument is intirely different.

It is far from being a neceſſary part of the atheiſt's creed to exclude deſign from the univerſe. He places that deſign in the energy of nature, which Dr. Prieſtley gives to ſome other extraneous Being. It is rather inconſiſtent alſo in him to ſay, that an atheiſt rightly judging of his own ſituation upon his own principles, ought not to hold himſelf quite ſecure from a future ſtate of reſponſibility and exiſtences, and yet to ſay he muſt, in his own ideas hold himſelf ſoon to be excluded for ever from life.

As to the immutability of the Deity, it is difficult to gueſs how that is proved, except by the argument of *Lucus a non lucendo;* becauſe every thing is changing here, therefore the Deity never changes; which is neither an argument *a priori* nor *poſteriori* but *ſui generis*, merely applicable to the Deity.

From

From the imperial infinite intelligence of the Deity an argument is formed of his unity. Dr. Prieſtley ſays. "that two *infinite* intelligent Beings would coincide, and therefore that there can only be one ſuch Being." Two parallels will never coincide. That is one of the firſt axioms of Euclid, in whom Dr. Prieſtley believes as much as in his bible. If the Beings are infinite in extent and magnitude they muſt certainly coincide, but if they are only infinite in intelligence, it does not ſeem to be neceſſary that they ſhould.

The ubiquity of God is proved in this ſhort way "God made every thing, God controuls every thing. No power can act but where it is. Therefore God is preſent every where." The workman muſt certainly be preſent at his work, but when the work is done he may go about other buſineſs. If all the properties of matter, ſuch as gravity, elaſticity and other ſuch exiſted only by the perpetual leave and agency of the Deity, it may be argued he is in all places where matter is. Space, empty ſpace will ſtill exiſt without him. In this mode of proof Dr. Prieſtley muſt, contrary to the Newtonian ſyſtem, argue for a *Plenum*, before he proves the ubiquity. He cannot exclude ſpace from

from his mind, nor can he exclude gravity from matter. Yet can he admit matter as well as ſpace to be eternal, becauſe he will not allow the inactivity of God." "If God's works had a beginning he muſt have been *for a whole eternity* inactive." He ſeems to have an odd notion of etetnity, for he there allows it could have an end. The argument would be fairer in concluding "he muſt bave been inactive *or doing ſomething elſe.*"

The Deity ſet up, if not the creator of matter, is at leaſt the maſter of it, nor will his advocates by any means allow him to be material himſelf. They ſee ſome incongruity in admitting one piece of matter to be ſo complete a maſter of another. However Dr. Prieſtley and other arguers for a Deity would do well to conſider, that whatever is not matter, is a ſpace that matter may occupy. Therefore if God is not matter, and alſo is not ſpace, he is nothing. Dr. Prieſtley allows matter eternal, and its properties of gravity, elaſticity, electricity and others equally eternal. He ſays directly, that matter cannot exiſt without it's perpetually correſponding powers. The adjuſtment of thoſe powers he places in the Deity. But as we never ſee matter without the adjuſtment of thoſe

thoſe properties as well as the exiſtence of them, this drives him at laſt to ſay, the Deity muſt alſo have created matter, according to his ſyſtem eternally created it, cotemporarily with himſelf. Ideas abſurd and irreconcileable!

Diſcourſing upon the hypotheſis of "a fortuitous concourſe of atoms" Dr. Prieſtley aſks, "what reaſon we have to think that ſmall maſſes of matter can have power without communication *ab extra?*" Let this queſtion be returned, "have we not reaſon to think ſo from attraction the moſt common property in matter." To get rid of this difficulty he will not allow an atom of matter to be poſſeſſed originally of the moſt ſimple powers, though he is ready to allow matter to have been eternal. A magnet according to this ſyſtem muſt ſometime have exiſted without its magnetic power. He concludes there muſt be ſome original exiſtent Being. He ſhall be allowed many original exiſtent Beings if it pleaſes him. A man may be an originally exiſtent being, as well as any other. He is ſuperior to other animals in this world. In like manner there may be allowed ſuperior Beings to man (as moſt probably there are) and yet thoſe ſuperior Beings not have made man.

Dr. Prieſtley will have it, that all bodies are moved by external force. That does not ſeem quite neceſſary. Motion may as well be aſſerted to be originally a property of matter, or its true natural ſtate and reſt a deprivation of that property, as that reſt ſhould be its natural ſtate. Hume thought ſo, and Hume was no great fool, notwithſtanding Dr. Prieſtley makes ſo light of him. In fact matter never is, and therefore moſt probably never was found to be in a ſtate of reſt. Nor has Dr. Prieſtley any reaſon to ſuppoſe gravity, elaſticity and electricity to have been impreſt on bodies by a ſuperior Being, and not originally inherent in matter, unleſs to favour his own hypotheſis of a Deity. He abſolutely ſays matter could not have had thoſe powers without a communication from a ſuperior and intelligent Being. If matter is perceived in regulated motion, it is added bluntly, that it muſt be by a mover poſſeſſed of a competent intelligence, and that a Being therefore of ſuch power and intelligence *muſt* exiſt. Whoever finds no difficulty in believing the contrary will find as little difficulty in Mr. Hume's hypotheſis, that motion might as well as other powers and properties have been originally inherent in matter, or at leaſt have been a neceſſary reſult of ſome matter acting upon another.

It

It has always been a doubt with Theiſts, whether they can better prove their God's exiſtence by moral or phyſical conſiderations. Dr. Prieſtley ſeems to think the *forte* of the argument lies in the latter proof, and lays particular ſtreſs upon his obſervations reſpecting cauſe and effect, which therefore cannot here be ſo readily diſmiſſed. He makes great reference to the works of art. Theiſts are always for turning their God into an overgrown man. Anthropomorphites has long been a term applied to them. They give him hands and eyes nor can they conceive him otherwiſe than as a corporeal Being. In which, as before has been ſaid, they are very right, for there can only be in the world body and the ſpace which bodies occupy. But granting this great workman to have done ſo much, is it not quite an incontrovertible propoſition, that whoever firſt made a thing, as, for example, a chair or a table, muſt have had an adequate idea of it's nature and uſe. Dr. Prieſtley ſpeaks more correctly in another part, by ſaying, he muſt have been *capable* of comprehending it. The nature and uſe of things are often found out after they are made and by different perſons than the makers of them. Neither is there any analogy between the works of art, as a table or houſe,

and of nature, as a man or tree. Therefore there can be no arguing from one to another by analogy. Hume obſerves that the former works are done by reaſon and deſign, and the latter by generation and vegetation, and therefore arguing from effect to cauſes, it is probable, that the univerſe is generated or vegetated. At leaſt after all the obſervations about a table, it may be modeſtly aſked, whether there is not ſome difference between a table and the world? The Doctor will alſo find ſome difficulty in explaining the propriety of any argument of analogy between men and metals, which he does not at other times ſcruple to make?

A *gratis* aſſertion is firſt made, that all things we ſee are effects; then becauſe we ſee one thing cauſed, every thing muſt have been cauſed. His concluſion of the argument is ſtill more curious, "becauſe every thing was cauſed there muſt have been ſomething that was not cauſed." The cauſe ought to be proportioned to the effect. The effect is not infinite. Why then attribute infinity to the cauſe? This is Hume's argument. Prieſtley calls it ſhortly unworthy of a philoſopher. Let others judge! But ſurely, with all this infinity it may be aſked, why may not there have been an infinity of cauſes?

Another

Another argument is, that being unable to account, for what is, by any thing viſible, we muſt have recourſe to ſomething inviſible, and that inviſible power is what he calls God. Apply this argument to gravity, and the external force that is ſaid to cauſe every ſtone to fall is God. But if nothing viſible can to us account for the operations of nature, why muſt we have recourſe to what is inviſible? Why neceſſary to account at all for them? Or why may not viſible things account for them, although this perſon or another cannot tell which?

If nothing can begin to exiſt of itſelf or by the energy of material nature, it is more conſiſtent to allow a plurality of Deities, than one immediate Deity. An equality in a plurality of Deities might be objectionable. But that is not at all neceſſary, rather the contrary; and ſo was the Pagan theory, which is not ſo abſurd as the modern one. This univerſe or mundane ſyſtem may be the work of one hand, another of another, and ſo on. Where is the abſurdity of that? If the univerſe is applied to the ſolar ſyſtem, there is an appearance of its being formed by one deſign, and in that ſtile it might be ſaid to be the work of one hand.

But

But this Deity is aſſerted to be infinite, and to have made all other worlds and univerſes, though it does not appear by any unity of deſign that all other worlds and univerſes are one work with this.

Dr. Prieſtley himſelf allows that reaſon would drive us to require a cauſe of the Deity. He is himſelf obliged to conclude, after all his reaſoning, that we muſt acquieſce in our inability of having any idea on the ſubject; that is, how God could exiſt without a prior cauſe. At the ſame time he ſays the Deity cannot have a cauſe, and therefore we cannot reaſon about him. Why then all his own reaſoning? We make a Deity ourſelves, fall down and worſhip him. It is the molten calf over again. Idolatry is ſtill practiſed. The only difference is that now we worſhip idols of our imagination; before of our hands. "Still we muſt neceſſarily reſt at a Being that is infinite;" that is, when our reaſon drives us to the admiſſion of an infinite cauſe we muſt neceſſarily ſtop finitely in our career. Not content with this concluſion he adds, that we cannot help perceiving the exiſtence of this cauſe, though he owns that it is not an object of our conceptions. But even the Theiſt's argument

argument does not neceſſarily drive us to the admiſſion of an infinite cauſe. The argument is, "becauſe there is a man, and man has intelligence, we muſt neceſſarily admit of a Being of infinitely ſuperior intelligence." Would it not be nearly as well to argue, "becauſe there is a gooſe, therefore there muſt be a man."

What is there more which hinders a ſeries of finite cauſes to be carried back *ad infinitum*, than that the reaſoner or contemplator of the courſe of nature is tired. If this eternal ſeries could not exiſt, a Deity might with ſome propriety be ſaid to follow. Put the argument into a ſyllogiſtic form.

"The univerſe ſhews deſign;"

"It is abſurd to ſuppoſe an infinite ſucceſſion of finite cauſes;"

"Therefore there is an uncauſed intelligent cauſe of this univerſe."

Deny the ſecond aſſertion and the problem is deſtroyed. So far from its being difficult to ſuppoſe an eternity, it is the moſt difficult thing in the world to ſuppoſe any thing but an eternity. A

mind

mind, not afraid to think, will find it the moſt eaſy contemplation in the world to dwell upon. It is at leaſt a bold aſſertion, that *nothing can be more evident* than that plants and animals could not have proceeded from each other by ſucceſſion from all eternity. Surely to this may be anſwered, that it is more evident that two and two make four. But Dr. Prieſtley goes on to ſay, "that the primary cauſe of a man cannot be a man, any more than the cauſe of a ſound can be a ſound." Experience ſhews us all ſound is an effect of a cauſe. Does experience ſhew us more of a man than that he came from a man and a woman? To allow therefore that all men muſt have come from a man and a woman is as far as we can argue upon the ſubject, whilſt in reaſoning we truſt to experience. An argument is well built upon ſimilarity, therefore it is probable if one horſe had a cauſe all horſes had. But will not the argument be more conſonant to itſelf, in ſuppoſing all horſes had the ſame cauſe, and as one is ſeen to be generated from a horſe and a mare ſo all were from all eternity. It were a better argument in favour of a Deity or ſome inviſible agent to ſhew that a new animal came every now and then into life, without any body's knowing how or where.

It is allowed by Prieſtley and all other reaſoners, that the moſt capital argument that can be formed in ſupport of any theſis is to be built upon experience, or analogy to experience. Yet will many of theſe reaſoners, Dr. Prieſtley at leaſt for one, contend at the ſame time for the probability of a future life, when no inſtance can be given of any revival whatſoever. The ſame will contend, that their Deity can at pleaſure form new ſpecies of animals, though in fact we never do ſee new beings come into exiſtence. We ought only to argue from experience; and experience would teach us, that the ſpecies of all animals has eternally exiſted. Grant that we do not know, whether man has been eternal, or from a time, is it therefore becauſe we do not know, that we muſt ſay he came from God? That unknown Being, as he is ſometimes pompouſly and ridiculouſly called! The Devil is equally an unknown Being. The admiſſion of evil under a good Deity opens a ready door to the manichean ſyſtem, which ſeems much more rational than ſimple Deiſm.

The following chain of reaſoning, as uſed by Dr. Prieſtley, is well linked together to prove the weight and force of experience in reaſoning,

but it proves nothing more. "Chairs and tables are made by men or Beings of ſimilar powers, becauſe we ſee them made by men; and we cannot ſuppoſe them made by a tree or come into being of themſelves, becauſe that is againſt experience. No one will ſay one table might make another, or that one man might make another. We ſee nothing come into being without an adequate cauſe." Yet for this adequate cauſe we are at the ſame time referred to a belief in a cauſeleſs ſecret inviſible agent, and to our own experience, for a proof of his nature.

Dr. Prieſtley allows, that what is *viſible* in man may be the ſeat of all his powers, for it is (as he ſays,) a rule in philoſophy not to multiply cauſes without neceſſity. But he affirms that what is *viſible* in the univerſe cannot be the ſeat of intelligence. This is breaking the very rule of reaſoning which he himſelf has choſen to adopt; and he gives no other reaſon for it, than becauſe we do not ſee the univerſe think as we do man. Senſible of this dilemma, ſoon afterwards he inclines to allow a principle of thought to the univerſe, for he adds, that if we allow it, yet the univerſe has ſo much the appearance of other works of

of deſign that we muſt look out for its author as much as that of a man; and it is allowed that moſt probably it had the ſame author.

Every difficulty vaniſhes with the energy of nature, or at leaſt is as well accounted for as from an independent Deity. It is an uſual queſtion to thoſe philoſophers, who maintain that the preſent exiſtence of things is the reſult of the force and energy of nature acting upon herſelf, "why this force does not perpetually operate and produce new appearances?" Beſides that this queſtion may be retorted upon the ſupporters of a Deity, I am thoroughly perſuaded, that this force is conſtantly in action, and that every change which animals and vegetables undergo, whether of diſſolution or renovation, is a manifeſt and undeniable proof of it. Man, and the other Beings which occupy this terreſtrial globe, are evidently ſuited to its preſent ſtate, and an alteration in their habitation, ſuch as that of extreme or exceſſive heat, would inevitably deſtroy them. This is ſo certain, that bones of animals have been dug up which appertain to no ſpecies now exiſting, and which muſt have periſhed from an alteration in the ſyſtem of things taking place too conſiderable for it to endure. Whenever

the globe ſhall come to that temperament fit for the life of that loſt ſpecies, whatever energy in nature produced it originally, if even it had a beginning, will moſt probably be ſufficient to produce it again. Is not the reparation of vegitable life in the ſpring equally wonderful now as its firſt production? Yet this is a plain effect of the influence of the ſun, whoſe abſence would occaſion death by a perpetual winter. So far is this queſtion from containing, in my opinion, a formidable difficulty to the Epicurean ſyſtem, I cannot help judging the continual mutability of things as an irrefragable proof of this eternal energy of nature. Thoſe who aſk, why the great changes in the ſtate of things are not more frequent, would abſurdly require them to enſue within the ſhort ſpace of their exiſtence, forgetting that millions of ages are of no importance to the whole maſs of matter, though Beings of ſome particular forms may find a wiſh and an advantage to prolong the term of their duration under that form.

If it is ſaid, Nature or the energy of nature is another name for the Deity, then may Dr. Prieſtley and his anſwerer ſhake hands; the one is no more an atheiſt than the other. And if it is obſerved, that

that the Energy of Nature having produced men may be capable of re-producing them, ſo that an atheiſt is not ſure to eſcape puniſhment for his crimes, it is eaſy to ſay in return, neither is a Deiſt ſure. A good atheiſt has no more reaſon to be afraid to be re-produced than a good Deiſt or a Chriſtian. It may be uſeful for both of them to be good. If neceſſary let it again be repeated, that it is not at all meant in this anſwer to make atheiſm a plea or protection for immorality. That is a charge long and moſt unjuſtly put upon the poor undefended atheiſt. The knowledge of a God and even the belief of a providence are found but too ſlight a barrier againſt human paſſions, which are apt to fly out as licentiouſly as they would otherwiſe have done. All, which this creed can in reality produce, ſcarce goes beyond ſome exterior exerciſes, which are vainly thought to reconcile man to God. It may make men build temples, ſacrifice victims, offer up prayers, or perform ſomething of the like nature; but never break a criminal intrigue, reſtore an ill-gotten wealth, or mortify the luſt of man. Luſt being the ſource of every crime, it is evident (ſince it reigns as much among dolaters and anthropomorphites, as among atheiſts) idolaters and anthropomorphites muſt be as ſuſceptible of all

ſorts

ſorts of crimes as atheiſts, and neither the one ſet nor the other could form ſocieties, did not a curb, ſtronger than that of religion, namely human laws, repreſs their perverſeneſs. If no other remedy were applied to vice than the remonſtrances of divines, a great city, ſuch as London, would in a fortnight's time, fall into the moſt horrid diſorders. Whatever may be the difference of faith, vice predominates alike with the Chriſtian and the Jew, with the Deiſt and the atheiſt. So like are they in their actions, that one would think they copied one another. Religion may make men follow ceremonies; little is the inconvenience found in them. A great triumph truly for religion to make men baptiſe or faſt? When did it make men do virtuous actions for virtue's ſake, or practiſe fewer inventions to get rich, where riches could not be acquired without poverty to others? The true principle moſt commonly ſeen in human actions, and which philoſophy will cure ſooner than religion, is the natural inclination of man for pleaſure, or a taſte contracted for certain objects by prejudice and habit. Theſe prevail in whatſoever faith a man is educated, or with whatever knowlege he may ſtore his mind.

But

But it will be ſaid, thoſe who commit crimes are atheiſts at the time at leaſt they do ſo. But an atheiſt cannot be ſuperſtitious, and criminals are often ſo at the very moment of their crimes. Religious perſuaſion men are not doubted to have when they vent their rage upon others of a different way of thinking, when they expreſs a dread of danger or a zeal for ceremonies. Theſe at leaſt are not virtues; and few indeed muſt be thoſe, who at any time are really Theiſts, if their faith is loſt or forgotten every time they have a mind to indulge a vitious paſſion. To ſupport ſtill the efficacy of religion in making men virtuous is to oppoſe metaphyſical reaſoning to the truth of fact; it is like the philoſopher denying motion, and being refuted by one of his ſcholars walking acroſs the room. If then it is true, as hiſtory and the whole courſe of human life ſhew it is, that men can ſtill plunge themſelves into all ſorts of crimes, though they are perſuaded of the truth of religion, which is made to inform them that God puniſhes ſin and rewards good actions, it cannot but be ſuſpected that religion even encourages crimes, by the hopes it gives of pardon through the efficacy of prayer; at all events it muſt be granted, that thoſe who hold up

a belief in God as a ſufficient proof and character of a good life are moſt egregiouſly miſtaken.

Some Theiſts mayhave a lighter ſenſe of perſonal dignity than ſome atheiſts. If the Theiſt thinks himſelf allied to and connected with the Deity he may plume himſelf upon his ſtation; but how apt are thoſe worſhipers of a God, inſtead of having a high ſenſe of perſonal dignity, to debaſe themſelves into the moſt abject beings, dreading even the ſhadow of their own phantom. An atheiſt feeling himſelf to be a link in the grand chain of Nature, feels his relative importance and dreads no imaginary Being. An atheiſt, who is ſo from inattention and without intelligence, may indeed feel himſelf as much debaſed as the meaneſt and moſt humble Theiſt.

Another argument againſt atheiſts is, that where men are atheiſts it is generally found that their uſual turn of thinking and habits of life have inclined to make them ſo. Is not this to be turned upon Theiſts? But granting, that the idea of a ſupreme author is more pleaſing, and that the argument with reſpect to the exiſtence or non-exiſtence of a God was in *equilibrio*, it is not therefore right to conclude

conclude that the mind ought to be determined by this or any other bias. Nor is it quite clear if there is no God (by which term let it again be noticed, is meant a Being of ſupreme intelligence, the contriver of the material univerſe and yet no part of the material ſyſtem) that the world in which man inhabits is either fatherleſs or deſerted. The wiſdom of nature ſupplies in reality what is only hoped for from the protection of the Deity. If the world has ſo good a mother, a father may well be ſpared, eſpecially ſuch a haughty jealous, and vindictive one as God is moſt generally repreſented to be.

Dr. Prieſtley being clear in his opinion; that the being of a God is capable of being proved by reaſon, is not ſo weak as ſome of his fellow-labourers, who hold the powers of reaſon in ſo low eſtimation as to be incapable of themſelves to arrive at almoſt any truth. He muſt however allow, if reaſon proves a Deity and his attributes there was leſs uſe of revelation to prove them. But the learned advocates of a Deity differ greatly among themſelves, whether his exiſtence is capable of being aſcertained by fixt principles of reaſon. After ſuch a difference and the inſtance of ſo many great men in all ages,

from Democritus downward, who have confidently denied the being of a God, whoſe arguments the learned Dr. Cudworth, in the laſt century, only by fully and fairly ſtating, with all the anſwers in his power to give (though his zeal in religion was never doubted) was thought by other divines to have given a weight to atheiſm not well to be overturned, it is ſurpriſing that it ſhould be the common belief of this day, that an argument in ſupport of atheiſm cannot ſtand a moment, and that even no man in his ſenſes can ever hold ſuch a doctrine. All that Epicurus and Lucretius have ſo greatly and convincingly ſaid is ſwept away in a moment by theſe better reaſoners, who yet ſcruple not to declare, with Dr. Prieſtley, that what they reaſon about is not the ſubject of human underſtanding. But let it be aſked, is it not abſurd to reaſon with a man about that of which that ſame man aſſerts we have no idea at all? Yet will Dr. Prieſtley argue, and ſay it is of no importance, whether the perſon with whom he argues has a conception or not of the ſubject. "Having no ideas includes no impoſſibility," therefore he goes on with his career of words to argue about an unſeen being with another whom he will allow to have no idea of the ſubject and yet it ſhall be of no avail in the diſpute, whether he has

has or no, or whether he is capable or incapable of having any. Reaſon failing, the paſſions are called upon, and the imagined God is repreſented at one time, with all the terrors of a revengeful tyrant, at another with all the tenderneſs of an affectionate parent. Shall then ſuch a tremendous Being with ſuch a care for the creatures he has made, ſuffer his own exiſtence to be a perpetual doubt? If the courſe of nature does not give ſufficient proof, why does not the hand divine ſhew itſelf by an extraordinary interpoſition of power? It is allowed miracles ought not to be cheap or plenty. One or two at leaſt every thouſand years might be admitted. But this is a perpetual ſtanding miracle, that ſuch a Being as the depicted God, the author of nature and all its works, ſhould exiſt and yet his exiſtence be perpetually in doubt, or require a Jeſus, a Mahomet or a Prieſtley to reveal it. Is not the writing of this very anſwer to the laſt of thoſe three great luminaries of religion a proof, that no God, or no *ſuch* God at leaſt, exiſts. Hear the admirable words of the author of "The Syſtem of Nature;" *Comment permet il qu'un mortel comme moi oſe attaquer ſes droits, ſes titres, ſon exiſtence meme?*

Dr. Clarke, Mr. Hume and Helvetius, are writers whoſe arguments for and againſt a Godhead Dr. Prieſtley has much noted. The former ſays, "the Deity muſt have been infinite, if ſelf-exiſtent, becauſe all things in the univerſe are made by him." Are all things in the univerſe infinite? Why an infinite maker of a finite work? It is juſter to argue, thatwhatever is ſelf-exiſtentmuſt have been eternal. Nor is there any great objection to the converſe of the propoſition properly taken, that whatever is not ſelf-exiſtent muſt have been created and therefore cannot have been eternal. If this is fair arguing, matter cannot according to Dr. Prieſtley's ſyſtem have been created and be eternal alſo. But Dr. Prieſtley has no inclination to reconcile hisopinions with thoſe of Dr. Clarke. He has choſen a fairer method, and that is, to refute the arguments of former aſſerters of a Deity as well as to eſtabliſh his own. Dr. Clarke he moſt effectually expoſes where he enters upon the ſubject of ſpace. It ſeems as if Dr. Clarke, having aſſerted that theDeity neceſſarily exiſted, had a mind that nothing elſe ſhould neceſſarily exiſt but the Deity; and conſcious that ſpace at leaſt alſo neceſſarily exiſted, he makes univerſal ſpace an attribute of the Deity. With this reverie

reverie in his head he raiſes a ſyllogiſm of complete nonſenſe (*vide Prieſtley's Letters, P.* 170.) where he ſuppoſes ſpace to be nothing though he alſo ſuppoſes it to be an attribute of the Deity. Making it therefore an attribute of the Deity and knowing that ſpace is eternal and unmeaſurable he takes upon himſelf thereby alſo clearly to have proved that the Deity is ſo. Exclude the Deity, ſpace will ſtill exiſt and ſtill be eternal and immenſe. Dr. Prieſtley knew well that Dr. Clarke's argument in this reſpect was all a fallacy, and therefore he ſhews his ſenſe in not adopting it. It is in fact an abuſe of terms unworthy of a ſcientific reaſoner.

The only argument attempted by Dr. Clarke, why the Deity muſt have had no cauſe, is, becauſe it is neceſſary he ſhould have none. Dr. Clarke ſays roundly that neceſſity is the cauſe of the exiſtence of the Deity. This is very near the language of the ancients, who held that Fate controuled the Gods. Neceſſity is therefore the firſt God. Why then any other God than Neceſſity? What more has Helvetius ſaid than that?

It is an old and unanſwerable argument that, granting a God and his power infinite, whatever he wills

wills is executed; but man and other animals are unhappy, therefore he does not will they ſhould be happy. Or take the argument the other way and it will equally conclude againſt his power. With regard to Mr. Hume's famous obſervations upon the evidence of miracles, Dr. Prieſtley thinks to make a ſhort havock of them by obſerving that new, and therefore miraculous appearances, are continually preſenting themſelves; but although ſuch new appearances may be inſtanced, they are not contrary to former experience, only in addition to it. With this alluſion to Natural Philoſophy, Dr. Prieſtley thinks himſelf in one ſhort ſentence to have diſcuſſed all Mr. Hume's obſervations upon miracles, "*Which is more likely, that the relater of a miracle ſhould have lied or been deceived, or that the thing related ſhould have exiſted contrary to experience prior and ſubſequent?*" Let the force of this obſervation be conſidered and believe in the hiſtory of miracles who can! To give a finiſhing ſtroke to poor Mr. Hume, Dr. Prieſtley obſerves that literary fame was Hume's only motive and conſolation, as he ſaid himſelf, in all his laborious enquiries and enlightened writings. At this he exclaims "What gloomy proſpect and poor comfort he muſt have had at his death!" If ſo, how much was he the greater man

man ſo well to have gone through that laſt ſcene!

The honour which Dr. Prieſtley gives to Helvetius, the author of that ingenious and ſatisfactory work intitled "The Syſtem of Nature," does credit to his own candour. He applauds him for ſpeaking out, he ought therefore to applaud this anſwer for the ſame reaſon. It is true he ſeems to have diſcovered one incongruity in the reaſoning of Helvetius. The words he imputes to him are, "that nature has no object, becauſe nature acts neceſſarily; man has an object; yet man alſo acts neceſſarily." In the ſame way nature might have an object though it acted neceſſarily. But Helvetius adds, that the object which man has is a neceſſary object. The beſt defence of Helvetius (not in behalf of that paſſage, but of his general ſyſtem) is to let him ſpeak at large for himſelf; and the following quotation Dr. Prieſtley and the reader may accept as a ſpecimen of the ſtrength and juſtice of his argument, and as the concluſion of this anſwer.

"Theologians tell us, that the diſorder and evil, which is ſeen in the world, is not abſolute and real, but relatively and apparently ſuch, and does not diſprove

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hopes? They will doubtless say, that they judge of God's conduct by analogy, and that from the present appearance of his wisdom and goodness, they have a right to infer his future wisdom and goodness. But do not the present apperances of his want of wisdom or goodness justify us in concluding,

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ing, that he will always want them? If they are ſo often manifeſtly deficient in this world, what can aſſure us that they will abound more in the next? This kind of language therefore reſts upon no other Baſis than a prejudiced imagination, and ſignifies, that ſome men, having without examination adopted an opinion that God is good, cannot admit that he will conſent to let his creatures remain conſtantly unhappy. Yet this grand hypotheſis, of the unalterable felicity of mankind hereafter, is inſufficient to juſtify the Divinity in permitting the preſent fleeting and tranſitory marks of injuſtice and diſorder. If God can have been unjuſt for a moment, he has derogated, during that moment at leaſt, from his divine perfection, and is not unchangeably good; his juſtice then is liable to temporary alteration, and, if this be the caſe, who can give ſecurity for his juſtice and goodneſs continuing unalterable in a future life, the notion of which is ſet up only to exculpate his deviation from thoſe qualities in this?

In ſpite of the experience, which every inſtant gives the lie to that beneficence which men ſuppoſe in God, they continue to call him good. When we bewail the miſerable victims of thoſe diſorders

and calamities that ſo often overwhelm our ſpecies, we are confidently told that theſe ills are but apparent, and that if our ſhort-ſighted mind could fathom the depths of divine wiſdom, we ſhould always behold the greateſt bleſſings reſult from what we denominate evils. How deſpicable is ſo frivolous an anſwer! If we can find no good but in ſuch things as effect us in a manner which is agreeable and pleaſing to our actual exiſtence, we ſhall be obliged to confeſs that thoſe things which affect us, even but for a time, in a painful manner, are as certainly evil to us. To vindicate God's viſiting mankind with theſe evils ſome tell us, that he is juſt, and that they are chaſtiſements inflicted on mankind to puniſh the wrongs he has received from men. Thus a feeble mortal has the power to irritate and injure the almighty and eternal Being who created this world. To offend any one is, to afflict him, to diminiſh in ſome degree his happineſs, to make him feel a painful ſenſation. How can man poſſibly diſturb the felicity of the all-powerful ſovereign of nature! How can a frail creature, who has received from God his being and his temper, act againſt the inclinations of an irreſiſtable force which never conſents to ſin and diſorder? Beſides juſtice, according to the only ideas which we can have

have of it, ſuppoſes a fixt deſire to render every one his due. But theologians conſtantly preach that God owes us nothing, that the good things he affords are the voluntary effects of his beneficence, and that without any violence of his equity he can diſpoſe of his creatures as his choice or caprice may impel him. In this doctrine I ſee not the ſmalleſt ſhadow of juſtice, but the moſt hideous tyranny and ſhocking abuſe of power. In fact do we not ſee virtue and innocence plunged into an abyſs of miſery, while wickedneſs rears its triumphant head under the empire of this God whoſe juſtice is ſo much extalled? "This miſery, ſay you, is but for a time." Very well, Sirs, but your God is unjuſt for a time. "He chaſtiſes whom he loves (you will ſay) for their own benefit." But if he is perfectly good, why will he let them ſuffer at all? "He does it, perhaps to try them." But, if he knows all things, what occaſion is there for him to try any? If he is omnipotent, why need he vex himſelf about the vain deſign any one may form againſt him? Omnipotence ought to be exempt from any ſuch paſſions, as having neither equals nor rivals. But if this God is jealous of his glory, his titles and prerogative, why does he permit ſuch numbers of men to offend him? Why are any found

daring enough to refuſe the incenſe which his pride expects? *Why am I a feeble mortal permitted to attack his titles, his attributes and even his exiſtence?* Is this permiſſion a puniſhment on me for the abuſe of his grace and favour? He ſhould never have permitted me to abuſe them. Or the grace he beſtowed ſhould have been efficacious and have directed my ſteps according to his liking. "But, ſay you, he made man free." Alas? why did he preſent him with a gift of which he muſt have foreſeen the abuſe? Is this faculty of free agency, which enables me to reſiſt his power, to corrupt and rob him of his worſhippers, and in fine to bring eternal miſery on myſelf, a preſent worthy of his infinite goodneſs? In conſequence of the pretended abuſe of this fatal preſent, which an omniſcient and a good God ought not to have beſtowed on Beings capable of abuſing it, everlaſting, inexpreſſible torments are reſerved for the tranſitory crimes of a Being made liable to commit them. Would that father be called good, reaſonable, juſt and kind, who put a ſharp-edged and dangerous knife into the hand of a playful and imprudent child, whom he before knew to be imprudent, and puniſhed him during the remainder of his life for cutting himſelf with it? Would that prince be called juſt and merciful, who,

not

not regarding any proportion between the offence and the puniſhment, ſhould perpetually exerciſe his power of vengeance, over one of his ſubjects who, being drunk, had raſhly offended againſt his vanity, without cauſing any real harm to him, eſpecially, when the prince had taken pains to make him drunk? Should we conſider as almighty a monarch, whoſe dominions were in ſuch confuſion and diſorder, that, except a ſmall number of obedient ſervants, all his ſubject were every inſtant deſpiſing his laws, defeating his will and inſulting his perſon? Let eccleſiaſtics then acknowledge, that their God is an aſſemblage of incompatible qualities, as incomprehenſible to their underſtanding as to mine. No: they ſay, in reply to theſe difficulties, that wiſdom and juſtice in God, are qualities ſo much above or ſo unlike thoſe qualities in us, that they bear no relation or affinity towards human wiſdom and juſtice. But, pray how am I to form to myſelf an idea of the divine perfection, unleſs it has ſome reſemblance to thoſe virtues which I obſerve in my fellow creatures and feel in myſelf? If the juſtice of God is not the ſame with human juſtice, why laſtly do any men pretend to announce it, comprehend and explain it to others?"

POSTCRIPT.

Previous to this publication the editor ſent the following Letter to Dr. Prieſtley.

" Reverend Sir,

HAD you thought it impoſſible for man to hold different ſentiments reſpecting Natural religion and the proof of the exiſtence of a God than you do, the Letters to a Philoſophical Unbeliever would not have appeared, much leſs would you have invited an anſwer by promiſing a reply to every objection. Differing from you in ſentiment I am the man who enter with you in the liſts; but I find myſelf upon conſultation with my friends under more difficulties than you were, and more to ſtand in need of courage in taking up the glove, than you needed to have in throwing it down. For this diſpute is not like others in philoſophy, where the vanquiſhed can only dread ridicule, contempt and diſappointment; here, whether victor or vanquiſhed, your opponent has to dread, beſide eccleſiaſtical cenſure, the ſcourges, chains and pillories of the courts of Law.

I accuſe

I accuſe you not of laying a trap for an unguarded author, but I aſk your friendly opinion, whether I can, with temporal ſafety at leaſt, maintain the contrary of your arguments in proof of a Deity and his attributes. If I cannot, no wonder the Theiſt cries *Victoria!* but then it is a little ungenerous to aſk for objections. Of you, I may certainly expect, that you will promiſe to uſe your influence, as well with lawyers as eccleſiaſtics, not to ſtir up a perſecution againſt a poor atheiſt in caſe there ſhould be one found in the kingdom, which people in general will not admit to be poſſible; or, if a perſecution could enſue, that you and your friends, favourers of free enquiry, will at leaſt bear the expences of it.

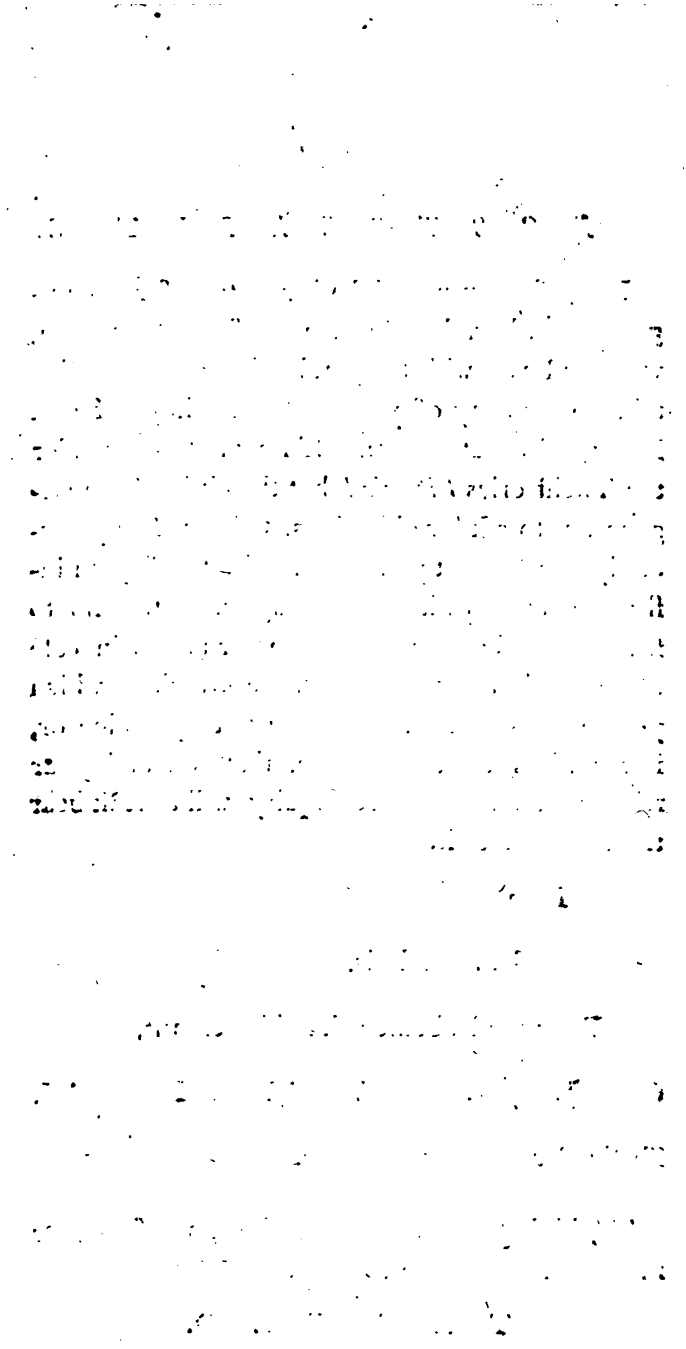
I am,

Reverend Sir,

Your moſt obedient humble ſervant,

Oct. 23. 1781. WILLIAM HAMMON.

To the Reverend Dr. Prieſtley.

To this letter Dr. Prieſtley ſent no anſwer; or no anſwer ever came to hand.

THE END.